

VZCZCXRO3776
RR RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHKUK
DE RUEHRB #1430/01 2091041
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 281041Z JUL 06
FM AMEMBASSY RABAT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 4349
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 3035
RUEHNC/AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT 3252
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 4315
RUEHCL/AMCONSUL CASABLANCA 1955

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 RABAT 001430

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/MAG, DRL

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [MO](#)
SUBJECT: TETOUAN'S SUMMER UNIVERSITY: PERSPECTIVES ON IMAGE
AND ISLAM

REF: A. RABAT 01412
[1](#)B. RABAT 01105
[1](#)C. RABAT 01371

[1](#)1. (U) Summary: The Tetouan summer university (conference), held July 13 through 15, focused on reforms in Morocco and was attended by a variety of students, professors, and civil society representatives. Polfsn political specialist also attended the conference. This cable summarizes the views expressed by the conference attendees on so-called "populist" Islam, including its role in society in general and specifically in the developing political life of the country. Morocco has created an image of itself as modern, pro-Western, and capable of blending traditional Islamic culture with the needs of a secular society. Abdallah Saaf, Director of the Center for Social Studies, which sponsored the conference, referred to this image creation as "adaptive modernization." The discussions about Islam and political life were lively as participants debated their understanding of Islamist movements in Morocco. End Summary.

Images of Morocco

[1](#)2. (U) Driss Allam, a political scientist at Hassan II University in Casablanca, emphasized that Morocco has created an image of itself as tolerant, understanding and acting with moderation both domestically and internationally. He continued by saying that it is Morocco's contacts with Europe, historically and in the present, which help to make it appear "civilized" and make it a tourist destination. The social harmony in Morocco coupled with it's "secret" contacts with Israel and its long history of tolerance of Jews insulate Morocco from radicalism and Islamic extremism, according to Allam. Allam and other participants interpret the merging of religious and secular leadership in the king as a rejection of violent confrontation and anchoring "political legitimacy in compromise, cooperation and consensus."

[1](#)3. (U) While Allam viewed Morocco as being integrated with the West, other participants said that Moroccans hate the West, as evidenced by the popular demonstration held in Rabat in April 2005. The demonstration, ostensibly to support the Palestinians, was allowed to be held, according to some participants, to enable the population to rid itself of anger about the inconsistencies in Morocco. These participants identified the lack of economic development, underage workers, and widespread illiteracy as contradicting the image Allam portrayed.

¶4. (U) Other participants noted that there is a difference between image and reality, which they called a "gap." Some of the participants said that the current generation of young adults has grown up on broken promises, false hopes, unrealistic expectations, cultural uncertainty and political manipulation. Some of the panelists thought that, if the gap between the image of Morocco and the reality widens, there might be a risk of political violence. These panelists identified the conditions which intensify the gap as: economic problems, malaise among the unemployed youth living in poor conditions, and few prospects of finding employment for those with high school and university degrees.

¶5. (U) Conference participants said that despite evidence of democratization, the Moroccan "ruling class" promulgates a culture of cynicism, contempt and corruption. Some participants thought that this promulgation influences the attitudes and political behavior of people for whom education is just a means to advance their own interests and increase their personal status and privileges. This situation leaves, participants said, those who do not have the same advantages, with two options: leaving Morocco or joining an "underground economy."

Political Parties and Islam

¶6. (U) Student participants understood the 2002 parliamentary elections as part of an ongoing democratization process. But, according to the students, the most representative group for the population is the Justice and Charity Organization (JCO) and it was not represented in the

RABAT 00001430 002 OF 002

elections (reftels B, C). According to panelists, the Islamists, who come from both well-educated and uneducated backgrounds, are the exception to Morocco's political cynicism. Islamists are politically active and seek to accomplish change through Islam, which represents the first serious break with Morocco's past because Islamists reject many of the core values promoted by their predecessors.

¶7. (U) Several panelists argued that, unlike earlier generations, today's Islamists understand political realities. Sheikh Yassine, the spiritual leader of the JCO, has a clear message, according to the panelists: politics articulates populist aspirations in a socially coherent and culturally sensitive way. The Islamists, they pointed out, cut across generations, classes, gender, and regions to create an alternative program that challenges the political status quo. In addition, according to the panelists, the Islamists demonstrate a level of political conviction, purpose and activism that earns them respect. For some participants, the Islamists have clearly defined the "terms of engagement" which others must acknowledge and to which they must respond. Some participants pointed out that the details of Islamist programs are vague, but they are capable of mobilizing people.

¶8. (U) The Party of Justice and Development (PJD) was the only one identifying itself as Islamist that participated in the 2002 elections. It does not, however, according to participants, command the respect of the JCO. Participants identified respect for the JCO as emanating from its leader as much as from its ideology. Yassine argues for an "Islamic democracy" and the JCO provides many with "hope for change," the conference participants argued.

Visit Embassy Rabat's Classified Website;
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/rabat>

RILEY